

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6199

INFO AMEMBASSY BLANTYRE

AHEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 0135

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 0067

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BC, CH, SF

SUBJ: BOTSWANA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH RED CHINA

REFS: A) GABORONE 0030; B) GABORONE 0034

1. SUMMARY: DURING CONVERSATIONS ON OTHER MATTERS CHARGE' AND CHARLES TIBONE, SECRETARY, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, DISCUSSED THE BACKGROUND TO THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA (GOB) AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC). TIBONE SAID THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MERELY THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP SINCE GOB HAD VOTED FOR PRC ADMISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN 1971 AND HAD RECOGNIZED PRC LAST MARCH. TIBONE DENIED THAT THERE WAS ANY INTENT IN THE TIMING OF THE DECISION TO PUT PRESSURE ON SOUTH AFRICA WITH REGARD TO SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS, BUT RECOGNIZED THAT SOUTH AFRICA COULD
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NOT BE HAPPY AT THE DECISION. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING DISCUSSIONS ON JANUARY 10 ON A NUMBER OF MATTERS, THE CHARGE' AND CHARLES TIBONE DISCUSSED THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DECISION BY THE GOB TO RECOGNIZE THE PRC. TIBONE SAID THAT THE DECISION WAS A DIRECT OUTGROWTH OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT LAST MARCH BY THE GOB THAT IT RECOGNIZED THE PRC AS "THE ONLY LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT OF CHINA," WHICH IN TURN WAS THE LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE OF BOTSWANA'S VOTE IN 1971 TO SEAT THE PRC IN THE UN.

3. SHORTLY AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE IN MARCH, THE PRC CONTACTED THE BOTSWANA PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UN IN NEW YORK ABOUT THE QUESTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. ACCORDING TO TIBONE, THE CHINESE TOOK IT FOR GRANTED THAT RECOGNITION ALSO MEANT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, BUT FOR THE GOB THE QUESTION TOOK SEVERAL MONTHS OF DISCUSSION BEFORE THE DECISION WAS MADE. A FACTOR IN MAKING THE DECISION FOR THE GOB WAS THE INCONGRUITY OF THE SITUATION IF THEY RECOGNIZED THE PRC AND THEN REFUSED TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH IT. THE DECISION WHEN FINALLY TAKEN (JOINTLY WITH THE PRC) WAS FOR THE ANNOUNCEMENT TO BE MADE BY BOTH PARTIES ON DECEMBER 31, 1974; BUT FOR VARIOUS BUREAUCRATIC REASONS THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE ON JANUARY 7. THERE HAVE BEEN NO DISCUSSIONS, SO FAR, REGARDING THE OPENING OF A CHINESE MISSION IN GABORONE.

4. TIBONE DENIED THAT THE TIMING OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE RHODESIAN DEVELOPMENTS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CHINA COULD CAUSE CONCERN IN SOUTH AFRICA BUT HE REJECTED THE

DEA THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD MADE THE DECISION WITH THE IDEA OF PRESSURING SOUTH AFRICA.

5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE RECENT DECISION DOES INDEED FOLLOW THE TREND DESCRIBED BY TIBONE (AND IN SPITE OF TIBONE'S DENIALS) THE TIMING OF THE DECISION WOULD SEEM TO HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED AT LEAST TO SOME EXTENT BY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND SPECIFICALLY THE EVENTS IN RHODESIA. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH PRC AT THIS TIME
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HAS A NUMBER OF IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTSWANA, WHICH COULD NOT HAVE ESCAPED CONSIDERATION DURING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

A. IT STRENGTHENS KHAMA'S NON-ALIGNED CREDENTIALS AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES - NYERERE AND KAUNDA IN PARTICULAR AND THE OAU LEADERSHIP IN GENERAL DURING A PERIOD WHEN OAU SUPPORT IS NEEDED FOR SENSITIVE NEGOTIATIONS.

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CHINA CANNOT HELP BUT HAVE AN EFFECT ON SOUTH AFRICA. IN A RHODESIAN SCENARIO IN WHICH THE TALKS BREAK DOWN AND INSURGENCY BEGINS AGAIN, THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASED CHINESE INFLUENCE

AND EVEN A CHINESE INFLUENCE SOUTH OF THE ZAMBEZI MUST BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY SOUTH AFRICAN LEADERS.

C. THE ACTION WILL TEND TO DEVELOP INCREASED VISIBILITY FOR BOTSWANA ON THE WORLD POLITICAL SCENE. ESPECIALLY THE OPENING OF A CHINESE MISSION HERE WOULD STIMULATE INCREASED ATTENTION TOWARD BOTSWANA, INCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RUSSIANS FOLLOWING SUIT.
THOMSEN

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